

The
Melville Society

N E W S L E T T E R

MARCH, 1950

Volume VI

Number 1

This number marks the sixth year of publication for the Newsletter, the second in its present format. Those who, because of a typographical error on last year's covers, may assume that Volume V has apparently disappeared, are hereby informed that the four numbers published during 1949 constitute the missing volume. Since, to save printing expense, all covers for the entire year were printed at one time, the error necessarily remained uncorrected throughout the year. The new stock of covers printed for 1950 carries the correct volume number.

The rapidly increasing group of new members of the Society may be interested to know that the first appearance of the Newsletter (in type-written form) occurred during the spring of 1945. It came after an invitation had been extended to some fifty American literary scholars by John H. Birss, Harrison Hayford, and Tyrus Hillway to join in the establishment of the Melville Society. When Volume I, Number 1, was issued, the Society had twenty-one members. During the same year an election was held which resulted in the choice of Charles R. Anderson as president, Tyrus Hillway as secretary, and the following as additional members of the executive committee for terms expiring in successive years: Luther S. Mansfield, William Braswell, F. Barron Freeman, and Elizabeth Foster.

It has been our custom to have each member of the executive committee serve the final year of his five-year term as president of the Society. Thus, Mr. Mansfield served during 1947, Mr. Braswell during 1948, and Mr. Freeman during 1949. Our president this year is Miss Foster. Other members of the present executive committee are Howard P. Vincent (1951), Willard Thorp (1952), Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953), and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (1954). Mr. Hillway is serving his second three-year term (expiring in 1951) as secretary and editor of the Newsletter.

Our membership this year numbers 116, including one in France, one in England, and several in Canada. Sub-

scriptions were entered this year for three college libraries. Annual meetings of the Society have been held in 1946 (Washington), 1948 (New York), and 1949 (New York). As interest in Melville and the Society grows, it may be as well to restate here that our purpose has been to serve scholarship rather than antiquarianism and that the Newsletter is intended to be not a literary periodical but simply a means of exchanging information among our members.

Its usefulness will depend upon the comments and suggestions of members and the extent to which they continue to report news items of interest.

MELVILLE'S FIRST WHALING VOYAGE?

According to the New York *Herald Tribune* and other newspapers, Samuel T. Sukel of Pittsfield has recently discovered in a young people's magazine of 1835 an essay on whaling written by "a sturdy but well-educated young man of Massachusetts who had been on a whaling voyage." The essay is said to contain cetological information and figures of speech which very strongly resemble passages in *Moby-Dick* and which, Mr. Sukel believes, do not occur in any of Melville's known sources. He is quoted as deducing from these facts that Melville undertook a whaling voyage at the age of twelve and wrote the essay for the magazine, later using some of the same materials in *Moby-Dick*.

While very serious objections may be raised to this theory (e.g., that Melville was not "a young man of Massachusetts" but a New Yorker, that the facts of his life are sufficiently well known to make such an early whaling voyage improbable, that all the literary and scientific sources of *Moby-Dick* have not necessarily been identified, that the essay itself may have been one of Melville's sources, etc.), the idea of a previously unsuspected whaling experience is an intriguing one; and it is hoped that Mr. Sukel will present a documented exposition of his theory for the consideration of Melville scholars.

SEALTS CHECK-LIST

Many members of the Society have inquired regarding the check-list of Melville's reading which was prepared by Merton Sealts and published in parts in the **Harvard Library Bulletin**. It was expected that copies would be available for distribution to all paid-up members during February of this year. At this writing the secretary is momentarily expecting to receive a shipment of 100 copies from the Harvard Press. These will be mailed to members as soon as received. It is conceivable that they may arrive in time to be placed in the same envelope with this issue of the Newsletter.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Kenneth Kurtz reports that an excellent master's thesis on "Melville's Conception of the Hero" has been completed (1949) by Verna Gale at Occidental College. The manuscript may be secured on loan, with the author's permission, from the Occidental College librarian.

An interesting Christmas card received this winter from Richard Purcell of Boston contains the following quotation from Melville: "Come; let us squeeze hands all round . . ."

Moby-Dick is among the titles announced in the new Harper's Modern Classics Series. An introduction is supplied by Clifton Fadiman.

The publication date of Newton Arvin's book on Melville in the American Men of Letters series (Sloane) was announced as March 20.

Stuart C. Sherman of the Providence (R. I.) Public Library reports progress in his investigations regarding the original Israel Potter, described in Melville's source as a "native of Cranston, Rhode Island."

James Mason (910 St. Olaf Ave., Northfield, Minn.) is interested in Melville's possible contact with and knowledge of Mormonism.

Tyrus Hillway has undertaken a brief study of Polynesian legends used by Melville in **Mardi**.

C. Merton Babcock (Michigan State College) is well into a study of the lin-

guistic and lexicographical aspects of **Moby-Dick**.

MOBY-DICK CENTENNIAL

There has already been some discussion of what the Society may do in observance of the **Moby-Dick** centennial in 1951. The following suggestions received from Stuart C. Sherman are passed along as examples of the type of activity which the members may care to sponsor. Comments on these and further ideas are solicited.

1. Appoint a special committee to develop appropriate plans.
2. Urge libraries, especially Harvard and N. Y. P. L., to exhibit their Melville treasures and to sponsor lectures.
3. Urge members to lecture on Melville in their own communities and to stimulate interest within educational institutions.
4. Plan a special meeting of the Society to coincide with the publication date of **Moby-Dick** in the collected edition.
5. Conduct activities at Arrowhead during the summer.
6. Investigate the possibility of participation by Harper & Brothers in the role of Melville's early publishers.
7. Increase membership dues to cover the cost of microfilming Melville manuscripts and placing them on sale among scholars, libraries, and collectors.

Proposals for the program of an annual meeting should be forwarded to our president, Elizabeth Foster, at Oberlin College, or to the secretary. In view of past experience, our members may wish to hold the meeting in December, at the time of the Modern Language Association convention in New York City. Harry R. Warfel, chairman of the program for the American Literature Group of M. L. A., has already suggested that this year's papers be devoted to Melville. If this plan is carried through, it will provide an incentive to attend both the M. L. A. convention and our own meeting. Some objections have been raised, however, on the basis that 1951 rather than 1950 would be a more appropriate year for concentration upon Melville.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER
IS PUBLISHED THREE OR FOUR TIMES EACH YEAR
for the members of the Melville Society, a group of scholars
and other persons interested in the life and works of Herman
Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of informa-
tion among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life
and works, and to contribute toward the improvement of the
facilities for literary, historical, and bibliographical research.
Membership (including subscription to the Newsletter) may be
secured through payment of one dollar annually to the Secretary,
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